Saint Sebastian's Ranch of Respite (for the Wickedly Weary)

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Saint Sebastian's Ranch of Respite (for the Wickedly Weary)

by BelladonnaWyck, raiast

Summary

"We're here," Jack announces unnecessarily, as though Will can't clearly see the ornate wooden sign denoting the fact they've just crossed onto the property of ***Saint Sebastian's Ranch of Respite.***

"Jesus Christ, where are you dumping me?" Will mutters, blanching at the name of the ***healing center,*** *as it had been so aptly named when it had been pitched to him.*

Notes

Day 11 of AU_Gust Prompts is: Ranch/Farm

Did someone say Murder Ranch?

See the end of the work for more notes

“You didn’t have to drive me out here yourself, you know,” Will mutters to the heavy silence of the SUV. His warm breath fans against the cool window where his head rests, fogging the glass until the narrow field of vision he has of the dragging landscape is obscured. “I’m not some kid that’s going to attempt to flee from his fate the first chance he gets.”

Jack shifts uncomfortably in the driver’s seat for possibly the hundredth time since he picked Will up in Wolf Trap. “The Bureau is requiring my sign-off of the transfer.”

Will’s unamused huff only further fogs the glass. “You make it sound like signing over the title of a car. I’m a *person,* Jack.”

“A person that was bound for the BSHCI before I intervened,” Jack snaps back. “Is that where you’d rather be, Will? Under Chilton’s thumb? This was the best possible alternative and you know it.”

Will pulls his forehead from the glass to pin Jack with an icy glare - not that the agent can see it, eyes trained on the road as they are. “The *best possible alternative* was you leaving me in the classroom where I wanted to be. But you just couldn’t do that, could you?”

“I knew you would save lives,” Jack defends himself, as ever, with the same tired line. Will wishes he’d never bothered to move his head from its resting place against the glass; returning to his previous position would only feel like a retreat now. “I didn’t know at the time that you’d take as many as you saved. *Guilty,* yes,” he amends quickly, before Will can even open his mouth to defend himself, “But lives all the same.”

“I suspect there’s a lot of things you don’t think of, Jack,” Will mutters, staring dolefully ahead through the windshield. “I’m beginning to think that’s why you needed me in the first place.”

Jack ignores the jibe, doesn’t bother to turn on his blinker as he makes one more final turn down a long dirt road. “We’re here,” he announces unnecessarily, as though Will can’t clearly see the ornate wooden sign denoting the fact they’ve just crossed onto the property of *Saint Sebastian’s Ranch of Respite.*

“Jesus Christ, where are you dumping me?” Will mutters, blanching at the name of the *healing center,* as it had been so aptly named when it had been pitched to him.

Jack doesn’t bother answering him, to Will’s unending lack of surprise, and merely continues on the dusty trail, slowing as they reach a building - the first of many across a vast compound, Will can see - denoted as the *Main Office* and *Visitor’s Center.*

Someone has stepped from the main building before Jack even puts the SUV in park, and Will has to blink through the cloud of dust they’ve kicked up to make sure he’s *actually* seeing the horrendous pattern of the *three-piece suit* the man is wearing as he approaches the vehicle. Jack hops out as he reaches them, thrusting his hand out in greeting. Will can see their lips move through the glass, notes the gaze of the stranger flicking to him before resting

upon Jack once again, and then the man is moving, making his way around the vehicle to Will's door.

He opens it without hesitation, as though Will might not pose any threat whatsoever to him, despite the nature of his visit, and bestows upon him a friendly smile. "Hello, Will. Welcome to Saint Sebastian's. I've heard a lot about you."

"I'm sure," Will mutters, feeling oddly restrained and constricted by the seatbelt still clasped across him. "You must be Lecter."

"Doctor Lecter, yes," the man corrects without offense, his smile only pulling wider. His thin lips aren't *off-putting,* per se, but do nothing to distract from the sharp cheekbones that cut across his features, the hollows of his cheeks created by that very same bone structure. It's a sight at once unsettling and enthralling, and Will hates himself a little for the fact that he can't seem to pull his gaze away. "I'm so pleased you've come to join us."

"I'm sorry to say we differ on that opinion."

Jack, who has come around the SUV to stand beside Lecter, scowls deeply at Will's manners, but the director of the ranch merely gives a soft chuckle at Will's brevity. "Yes, I imagine so. All the same, I hope that you'll be swayed to my side of the fence, in time. Shall we get you settled in?"

Will reaches for the buckle of his seatbelt, hands pausing on the clasp. He knows there's no *out* to this, no way he can fight it, but all the same he can't help but feel that releasing that final clasp, allowing the last barrier between himself and this place where he's being stashed away to disappear is a form of surrender. Accepting defeat.

Lecter tips his head closer, amber eyes warm and kind as he murmurs, "It's daunting, I know, to allow yourself into the care of another. I can't say that I've never held the same reservations. But from all I've read, I truly think you will thrive here, Will. And I look forward to coming to know you personally."

Will presses the latch on the seatbelt, the sound still ringing in his ears as he slips from the SUV to stand in the middle of the dirt road on trembling legs. His chest feels tight, his breaths faltering and stilted, and he wants to say he's not comforted by the unfamiliar hand that grasps his shoulder warmly, but, frustratingly enough, he *can't.* "What's next?" He asks around the lump in his throat, hating that his voice is just as shaky as his limbs, wet with the threat of unshed tears.

"I believe Agent Crawford and myself have a bit of paperwork to see to," Lecter admits, almost regretfully. "In the meantime, I'll have one of my staff show you around the compound. Ah, here he is now, right on time." Lecter turns toward a young man approaching them from around the side of the main building. "Randall, thank you for taking time from your duties. Will, this is Randall Tier. He was a young man standing just in the spot you are, once upon a time. But after a stretch at my ranch he was more than ready to venture back out into that rough and tumble world."

"So what's he doing here?"

"Will," Jack hisses, but Lecter gives a wave of his hand and a sly smile at Will's brash retort, tipping his gaze in Randall's direction.

"Dr. Lecter helped me more than I ever thought possible," the young man answers for himself, unashamed and unoffended by Will's question. "I was just a boy when I was brought here, and Dr. Lecter helped to shape me into the man I am today. I returned to Saint Sebastian's two years ago when I realized my passion would always lie in helping others find themselves the way that Dr. Lecter helped me."

"Randall, if you wouldn't mind showing Will around the grounds while I finish things up with Agent Crawford?" Hannibal gestures at the wide open space surrounding them, hundreds of acres of land in rural northern Maryland.

"Sure thing, Doc." Will didn't roll his eyes, but it was a near thing. He can feel the tension still thick in the air radiating from Jack and there wasn't a need to set the man off even more.

Will turns to follow Randall as he lopes off back the way he came, walking at a slow pace so Will can catch up. Before Will can take even a step forward, he feels Jack's eyes on him and pivots slowly.

Jack stares at him for several long seconds as though he's trying to find the answers to *what's wrong with Will Graham* somewhere in Will's eyes, or in the slope of his shoulders or the tightness in his jaw. When he doesn't find what he seeks he shakes his head and gives Will a slightly sad smile. It makes something sick in Will's stomach twist and he wants to rip the look from Jack's face.

"Take care, Will. We'll be in touch." And with that, he's led away by Lecter and Will looks up to see Randall waiting for him by what he presumes is a barn on the other side of the main building.

He makes his way over and Randall points to a rack of various gear. "You might wanna put on a pair of galoshes for the *tour,"* Randall's voice is still welcoming and unassuming, but there's something slightly darker about it now, with fewer prying eyes to pay attention. Will files it away for later and declines the shoes.

"I'm from the Bayou. I know a thing or two about wandering around on unpredictable property. I'll manage." Will tries not to sound abrasive, but he's sure he falls short of friendly.

Randall only hums in reply and turns to the left of the building, keeping close to the wall as he walks Will out in the direction of a far off fence. Will puts his hand over his eyes to cover them from the sun. It's not overly bright today, looks like it'll rain sooner rather than later, but the sun is just high enough in the sky to be a nuisance.

He sees movement from the corner of his eye and turns towards it. There's someone in the distance walking along the edge of the woods on the other side of the fence.

"Who's that?"

Randall follows Will's gaze and smiles softly, and Will files that away for later as well. "That's Francis. He isn't around much, tends to do better on his own. He's been here even longer than me but he still doesn't play well with others."

He doesn't offer anything further explanation, and Will doesn't think he'd get more even if he asked, so he continues on in silence, walking alongside Randall now.

They reach the fence, finally, after several minutes of walking, and Randall leans against it. He looks in his element here, out in nature and surrounded by miles of nothing. Will has the sharp consideration that Randall might also *not play well with others,* but he doesn't comment.

"What're you here for?" Randall asks after a few more stretched out moments of silence, breaking Will from his internal musings. He was prepared for the question eventually but finds even still he isn't sure what to say.

"Maybe I also have a problem with people coming into my sandbox." Will eventually replies. What a group Lecter has managed to gather here, a bunch of misfits and people who struggle to make meaningful attachments to others. The entire set up feels rife for the breeding of sociopaths. Will shakes the thought off, eyes again drawn to a brief flash of movement, this time much lower to the ground than a person.

"Are there a lot of wild animals out here?"

Randall's grin widens obviously at the question, something mirthful twining around something dangerous in the glint in his eyes. "Sure, all kinds of animals in these parts. But that's just Winston. He's a stray. Nobody can get him to come so sometimes we just bring him food out here."

"Let's head to the stables. You like to ride?" Randall asks after a few seconds, Will's eyes drawn back to him from the pitiful creature he can just barely make out in the bushes.

"Uh, I haven't ridden a horse since I was a kid and fell off a pony at a carnival," Will chuckles self-deprecatingly, trying to dispel some of the tension that seems to have grown between them.

"Well these sure aren't ponies, but we have some that are easy enough for beginners. I could at least show you some of the basics. It'll be a while with the Doc." Randall starts walking back towards the way they came, veering slightly to the right towards another row of buildings Will hadn't noticed before.

Once they've both turned their backs Will hears a quiet huff of a bark and turns back towards the fence to see the dog, a mutt by all definitions. He seems alert enough, but he's filthy and looks skinnier than Will would deem healthy for a dog his size. He cocks his head to look at Will, a far more intelligent gesture than Will expects from an assumedly untrained stray. The dog looks nearly sympathetic for *Will,* and it brings a smile to his lips unexpectedly.

The dog gives him another bark and a lazy wag of his tail but keeps his distance. He looks weary but hopeful, and Will feels a kinship with him.

“Yeah, me too, boy.” Will gives one final glance to the filthy dog before he turns to follow Randall to his next part of the *tour.*

“There are a few others on the ranch right now,” Randall explains as he pushes the door to the stables open; the action showcases the unexpected strength in the young man’s wiry form, corded muscles tensing in his arms and shoulders, and Will can’t help but wonder how someone with such a slight frame had come to tone those muscles so well, or *why.*

“But Dr. Lecter doesn’t care for patients to interact before he’s had a chance to do your assessment,” he continues, ushering Will into the building. “In the meantime, you can settle into your room, and if you want some outside time you’ll sign up for a private slot. You’ll be supervised with the animals, of course, but there are other places you can go to be alone.”

Will raises his eyebrow at that, pleasantly surprised to hear it. “Not afraid I’ll try to run off?”

“Well you wouldn’t be the first to try, or the last, I’m sure. But runners never make it too far. There’s not much to run to, out here, except maybe into the loving embrace of the coyotes. Dr. Lecter feels a sense of freedom is therapeutic in its own right. You’re not a prisoner here, you’re a guest. Your participation here may not be exactly *voluntary,* but it’s a far cry from being committed, trust me.”

Will thinks about the visit he made to the BSHCI immediately following Gideon’s escape. He recalls feeling claustrophobic as soon as he stepped inside the building, overcome with an unshakeable dread that he wouldn’t be allowed to leave again, even though he’d only visited for an interview in the first place. He remembers the greedy glint in Chilton’s beady eyes when he realized who Will was, can feel the chill of the too-cold hallways against his skin even now and shivers.

“Just give it a chance, keep an open mind,” Randall is still talking, and Will struggles to catch up, wondering how much he missed while he was trapped within the confines of his own mind. “I think you’ll like it here, Will. Most do.”

Will pulls his gaze from studying the interior of the building and finds the patient-turned-staff member eyeing him appraisingly. He must come to some mental conclusion, either confirming an initial assessment or finding himself pleased by whatever it is that he sees, because he gives a nod of his head to nothing in particular, the ghost of a smile playing on his lips.

“Come meet the horses.”

Will is allowed several days to adjust to his new life on the ranch before Lecter approaches him for an introductory therapy session. It’s been three days, and Will knows the good doctor is nearly chomping at the bit to tear into Will’s brain. He hates shrinks, always hungry, gluttonous for thoughts and feelings that don’t belong to them.

They’ve been sitting in silence for several minutes, and Will knows the peace won’t last forever so he decides to break it on his own terms.

“So what do we talk about? Are you gonna ask me about my relationship with my mother?” Will quips, fidgeting in his seat.

Hannibal’s lips purse in an aborted smile. “Awfully low hanging fruit I should say. No, I think I'd like to discuss why you're here.”

Of course he wants to know all the gritty details, all the darkest recesses of Will’s mind open and on display. “You read my file.”

Hannibal only nods in reply, anticipatory. “You know why I’m here.”

The doctor hums thoughtfully, shaking his head. “No, I know why the FBI sent you here. I'd like to hear why *you* think you're here.”

Will thinks back to blood, rivers of it. He thinks back to over a half dozen girls missing, forever lost to their families because they belong to too many other things now. Hair made into pillow stuffing, marrow used as building paste, their bones chiseled into knives and decorations to adorn an altar that will forever remain empty, the sole worshiper dead and buried but echoing in Will’s thoughts like a disease.

See.

He takes a breath to steady himself. Better to rip the bandaid off than to keep picking at the scab. The sooner he convinces Doctor Lecter he’s sane, the faster he’ll be back home with his dogs and his aloneness. “I tracked down the Minnesota Shrike. He was abducting girls that looked like his daughter. He… he was killing them and eating them, turning their parts into useful things to honor them. He found out we were getting close somehow and got spooked. By the time I showed up he’d already slit his wife’s throat and had a knife to his daughter’s. I had no other recourse but to shoot him to try and save her.”

“And did you?” Hannibal pauses, then adds on. “Save her?”

Will shakes his head, unable to form the words. He’d failed her, failed her mother. Failed all those missing girls that would remain missing eternally.

“You shot him ten times, Will.” Hannibal continues after allowing Will to collect himself for a moment.

“Was outta practice. It was my first time in the field since I left the force back in New Orleans. I panicked.”

Hannibal nods, jots something down in his book. “Tell me about Abel Gideon.”

“Escaped transport on his way to court weeks after brutally killing a nurse on staff. He started targeting the psychiatrists who’d tried treating him during his incarceration. I realized a colleague was on the list and got worried so I went to her house and found him there.”

“That’s very thoughtful for a simple colleague,” the doctor points out, and Will knows the way he glances away is just as damning as the heat that floods his cheeks and ears. He’s thankful when Hannibal opts not to push that observation further, though cringes at the

telltale scratching of his pen before he continues. “And he was inside, threatening her when you found him?”

“No, he was still outside. Planning out his attack.”

“And he was armed? Dangerous to himself and others?”

Will gives a sharp jerk of his head, he can’t deny the facts. He’s sure they’re all printed in uniform black font right there in the file he knows Hannibal has. “No.”

Hannibal hums, tilting his head like a curious bird as he observes Will. “Yet you shot him point blank in the head. Surely you could have simply subdued him?”

Will dips his head, equal parts ashamed and angry. “I could have, but I didn’t want to. I was angry he’d dare target Alana. She’s good and kind; she never tried to use him how the other doctors did. I wanted him to pay for threatening her.”

“He paid with his life, it would seem.” Hannibal agrees, no judgement evident in his voice. It’s obvious he can see Will projecting himself onto the situation with Alana and Abel, Will is certain Hannibal has read his file and knows Alana once tried to do therapy with him.

Will smiles bitterly, finally meeting Lecter’s eyes. “Now I’m paying with mine.”

Hannibal smiles back, and the gesture is so utterly alien on his features it almost tastes like sugar water in Will’s mouth with how sweet it is. “You’re not here to sacrifice your life, Will. You’re here to take it back.”

Will finds himself on the edge of the property, walking along the same half broken fence Randall had first shown him when he’d arrived, mind still buzzing after his first session with Dr. Lecter. It feels like he’s been here for years rather than a few brief days, and though he almost hates to admit it, he does feel better out here. Like his mind is clearer. Though the nightmares haven’t ceased, he finds himself slipping from concentration into oceans of blood and gore during his waking hours less and less.

The fact alone that Jack can’t contact him directly, that Will *knows* without a shadow of a doubt he won’t receive a three a.m. phone call dragging him from his bed to a crime scene has him feeling lighter than he has in months.

Even still, the sensation remains that the ranch isn’t all it appears to be. Something lurks beneath the bright and shiny surface, hidden away like a creature in dark water. And it’s not just with the staff, or the doctor, but with the compound as a whole. What’s even more unsettling to Will is the fact that it’s not, at all. Not unsettling, not unwelcome. He can feel that something insidious dwells in this place, these people, and instead of feeling like prey he simply feels like he’s -

Like he’s *home.*

Will ambles along the fence line, more than a little distracted by this realization when he hears a soft *woof* from the underbrush.

He walks closer to the edge, sees a flash of dirty, matted fur and a shaggy muzzle, and then the dog disappears from view for several minutes. Will digs in his pocket, pulls out the baggy of homemade jerky Hannibal had given him after their session. It had felt like a *treat* then, like *Will* was the dog instead of the mutt currently hiding in the bushes. Now it feels like an offering, like a perfect happenstance.

He pulls out several pieces and tosses them on the ground on the far side of the fence, closer to the dog than to himself to give the poor creature time to adjust to the idea of human kindness. He stands still as a statue, breath held as the dog creeps closer, snout to the ground as it sniffs out the scent of food, too enticing for it to remain in the safety of the trees. He smiles when his offering is accepted, the dog dropping to his belly with a soft huff as it begins to chew on the strip of meat.

Will sinks to the ground slowly, settling into the grass unmindful of it's slightly muddied state from the rain they'd gotten the night before. He waits until the mutt finishes chomping on its treat and raises its head to study Will before tossing another piece out, this one half the distance between him and the dog. It's a solid twenty minutes of this routine until the weather-worn creature finally ventures the remaining distance to the fence, slipping under the bottom rung with ease when Will scoots further back and holds out his last bite of jerky.

The dog accepts the final offering from Will's fingers gently and settles next to him on the ground. Will is pleased to find the dog pays little mind to his hand when he runs it carefully down its filthy flanks, and discovers up close that the name Winston is fitting after all; he is indeed a boy. They sit there even after Winston has finished his snack, Will idly petting him as Winston rests his head on Will's thigh.

"You're quite good at that," Hannibal notes behind him, and Will finds it somewhat odd that though neither he nor Winston heard the doctor approach, neither of them startle at the sudden sound of his voice. Winston lifts his head curiously when Hannibal settles on his other side, slipping to the ground as though he's not wearing what's probably a ridiculously expensive bespoke three-piece. "Fostering trust," he clarifies with a nod to the mutt between them.

"I collect strays."

"As do I," Hannibal quips, and Will glances to the doctor, can't stop his lips from spreading into a brief smile when he sees the slight smirk that tilts Hannibal's lips.

Will turns his gaze down to Winston, hand ruffling the matted fur around his ears. "Is that what I am? A stray? Another sheep to add to your flock?"

"I think the both of us know better than to label you a *sheep,* Will," Hannibal admonishes softly.

"What do you think I am, then?" Will utters the question before he can hesitate long enough for the words to die on his tongue, even though he's not certain he wants to hear the answer.

He pulls his eyes back up to train on the doctor's, even though he's not certain he wants to see what lies within them either.

"I wouldn't presume to know, just yet," Hannibal admits. "But I look forward to finding out together. Don't you?"

Will's breath catches in his throat, his eyes stinging with swift and unexpected tears when he confesses on the breath of a whisper, "I don't know if I'll like what I find."

"That's a natural fear," Hannibal assures him. He studies Will for a moment, amber eyes glinting, and Will is surprised when he opens his mouth and then closes it after a moment of hesitation. From what he's seen so far, the doctor is nothing but the embodiment of self-assured confidence. "We discussed why the FBI thinks you're here, and why *you* think you're here...would you like to know why *I* think you're here, Will?"

Will gives a tight nod, the rest of his body frozen in place. He doesn't know why his heart starts pounding erratically in his chest, his stomach twisting as though he's about to receive bad news. He doesn't know why he cares at all what this relative stranger, this *shrink* thinks.

"I think, deep down, you know *exactly* what you are. And I think you've crafted yourself into something that others expect you to be, despite knowing that it's an ill-fitting suit. Perhaps these...instances that arose that led you to this place were simply the result of the you - the *real* you - that you've tucked away finally lashing out, fighting for freedom."

Will chews on that for a moment, his heart still pounding, though it's not anxiety that buzzes through him any longer, but the tentative tendrils of excitement. Anticipation. "So why do you think I'm here, then?"

Hannibal's smile is the widest that Will has seen yet, flashes his gleaming teeth as that mirthful spark ignites in his eyes once more. "The zipper is stuck, or you can't reach it, and you need someone else to tug it down for you."

Will stares at the doctor, that uncertain excitement growing bolder, thrumming just beneath his skin. Once more he's overcome with the sensation this place is not what the FBI thought it was when they sent him here. He's still working on ungluing his tongue from the roof of his mouth, reaching for the words to ask if that was perhaps a service Hannibal provides, when the doctor's features shutter and then soften, his neutral, amiable expression back in place.

"There's just enough time before dinner to get him cleaned up," Hannibal notes, standing gracefully from his seat on the ground as he nods to Winston. "Please do so in the stables; Janitor Clancy will have a fit if he finds the bathtub caked with mud and dog fur. You clean up as well, when you're finished; I think you're ready to start eating with the group."

Will nods wordlessly, mind still spinning from the previous conversation and feeling off-kilter being pulled back into such innocent territory. He stands himself, urging Winston to do the same, and is about to turn in the direction of the stables when Hannibal pauses a few feet away and turns back to him.

“I rarely encourage sessions two days in a row, but I’d like to see you again tomorrow, if you’re amenable. I could use some help preparing lunch.”

Will nods again, anticipation clenching his stomach pleasantly once more. “Yeah. Sounds good.”

It’s amusing, how he’s almost *looking forward* to their next conversation, when all his life he’s been *running* from psychiatrists. But, it seems, perhaps he’s finally found the brand of therapy that’s *right* for him.

End Notes

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'Til next time! 💚 💜 BellaRai

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